

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
OMB-01 IO-13 TRSE-00 /080 W
-----105394 161004Z /11/15

R 120116Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9215
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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CORRECTED COPY TEXT (LINE 1 PARA 3)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, TH
SUBJ: RECENT STUDENT ACTIVITY IN THAILAND

REF: BANGKOK 21057

1. THE PROMULGATION OF A NEW CHARTER COVERING STUDENT GOVERNMENT AT THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY ON JULY 12 HAS LED TO THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT STUDENT PROTESTS SINCE THE COUP OF OCTOBER, 1976. RECENT STUDENT ACTIVITY WAS BRIEFLY MENTIONED IN REFTEL, BUT THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN ACTIVITY SINCE THAT TIME THAT HAS ATTRACTED INCREASED LOCAL MEDIA ATTENTION AND CAUSED UNIVERSITY AND OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO EXPRESS MILD CONCERN OVER DEVELOPMENTS.

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2. ON JULY 11, ABOUT 300 STUDENTS HELD A DISCUSSION AT THAMMASAT CONCERNING A PROPOSED STUDENT CHARTER ESTABLISHING A STUDENT UNION WHICH THE ADMINISTRATION DISRUPTED BY SHUTTING OFF ELECTRICAL POWER TO THE MEETING ROOM. SMALLER DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUED AND ON JULY 18, STUDENTS PRESENTED A LETTER SIGNED BY OVER 2000 OF THEIR NUMBER CALLING FOR A MEETING BETWEEN STUDENTS AND UNIVER-

SITY OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS THE CHARTER. UNIVERSITY RECTOR PRAPHAT UAI-CHAI REFUSED TO MEET WITH STUDENTS. STUDENTS REACTED BY HOLDING A SO-CALLED 'PANEL DISCUSSION' (IN TRUTH, A PROTEST RALLY) AT THAMMASAT ON JULY 28, WITH ABOUT 1000 STUDENTS PRESENT. THE RALLY WAS PEACEFUL AND ORDERLY AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO POLICE/STUDENT CONFRONTATIONS TO DATE. THE DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF COMMERCE RESPONDED BY BARRING STUDENTS FROM THE USE OF MEETING ROOMS, CLAIMING STUDENTS USED THE ROOM TO ORGANIZE THE JULY 28 PROTEST. SINCE THEN, THERE HAVE BEEN NO MAJOR STUDENT GATHERINGS, ALTHOUGH STUDENTS SUBMITTED A LETTER TO THE DEAN PROTESTING THE BAN ON USE OF THE MEETING ROOM. ON AUGUST 7 THERE WAS A LARGE GATHERING IN THE THAMMASAT AUDITORIUM FOR A COMMEMORATIVE EXHIBITION, BUT IT WAS NOT USED AS A VEHICLE FOR STUDENT PROTESTS AS HAD BEEN FEARED.

3. THERE HAS BEEN SOME ACTIVITY AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES BUT SO FAR SMALL AND UNRELATED TO THE THAMMASAT STUDENT CHARTER. THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHULALONGKORN STUDENT ASSOCIATION WROTE A LETTER SUPPORTING THE EFFORTS OF STUDENTS AT THAMMASAT TO CHANGE THE STUDENT CHARTER.

4. THE CONTROVERSIAL NEW CHARTER AT THAMMASAT WAS PROMULGATED BY UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS OVER THE OBJECTIONS OF THE STUDENTS SERVING ON THE CHARTER DRAFTING COMMITTEE. THE CHARTER IS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO A 'MODEL' CHARTER PREPARED CONFIDENTIAL

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BY THE STATE UNIVERSITIES BUREAU AND PROVIDES FOR A 17-MEMBER STUDENT GOVERNING COMMITTEE, COMPOSED OF STUDENTS CHOSEN THROUGH A COMPLEX PROCESS OF INDIRECT STUDENT ELECTIONS. ALL THE MEMBERS WOULD BE SUBJECT TO DISMISSAL AT THE RECTOR'S DISCRETION. THE STUDENTS ARE PROPOSING THAT THE MEMBERS BE ELECTED DIRECTLY BY THE WHOLE STUDENT BODY, AND SUBSEQUENTLY HAVE COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE FROM THE RECTOR'S AUTHORITY. BOTH THE RECTOR AND STATE UNIVERSITY MINISTER KASEM SUWANNAKUN HAVE INDICATED TOTAL OPPOSITION TO SUCH A PLAN.

5. EMBOFF DISCUSSED RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WITH THE VICE RECTOR FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS AT THAMMASAT, OTHER ADMINISTRATION FIGURES, AND A THAMMASAT INSTRUCTOR SYMPATHETIC TO THE STUDENT'S POSITION ON AUGUST 8. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG FACULTY FIGURES THAT RECENT ACTIONS CONCERNING THE CHARTER REPRESENTED A GROWING POLITICAL CONCERN AMONG THE STUDENTS, EVIDENCED BY AN INCREASED NUMBER OF POLITICAL POSTERS AND LEAFLETS APPEARING ON CAMPUS.

6. THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS EXPRESSED CONCERN

THAT STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY MIGHT MOVE OUTSIDE THE CAMPUS AS ELECTIONS APPROACH. IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT THIS FEAR PROMPTED RECTOR PRAPHAT ABRUPTLY TO CANCEL A PROPOSED PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION TO BE HELD AT THAMMASAT. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT THAMMASAT STUDENTS ARE BEGINNING TO ORGANIZE POLITICALLY, BUT ALL UNIVERSITY SOURCES ARE SO FAR UNABLE (OR UNWILLING) TO IDENTIFY EMERGING LEADERS. THE CONSENSUS SEEMS TO BE THAT STRONG STUDENT LEADERSHIP HAS NOT YET EMERGED. THERE IS A BEGINNING OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION BETWEEN LEFTISTS AND 'RIGHTISTS'. MANY PROFESSORS HAVE EXPRESSED THE FEAR TO US THAT THE CONFRONTATION POLICIES OF THE RECTOR AT THAMMASAT WILL CAUSE THE GENERALLY MODERATE STUDENT BODY TO LOOK TO THE LEFTISTS FOR LEADERSHIP.
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7. THAMMASAT STUDENTS BEGIN VOTING FOR REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE STUDENT GOVERNING COMMITTEE ON AUGUST 18, AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS WILL BE COMPLETED BY AUGUST 24. THERE

IS NO INDICATION AS TO HOW THE STUDENTS WILL REACT TO THE ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH EITHER A BOYCOTT OF ELECTIONS OR LARGER DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN MENTIONED AS POSSIBILITIES. ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS BELIEVE THE SITUATION AT THAMMASAT IS EASING. THEY ARE INVOLVED IN A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN TO WIN STUDENT ACCEPTANCE OR AT LEAST ACQUIESCENCE TO THE NEW CHARTER.

8. STUDENT GROUPS AT UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES IN GENERAL APPEAR CAUTIOUS, CLEARLY WORRIED OF POSSIBLE REPRISALS BY RIGHT-WING GROUPS WHICH ARE GENERALLY BELIEVED TO BE READY TO ACT SHOULD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THREATEN THE COUNTRY'S STABILITY. WHILE STUDENT ACTIVISM HAS SHOWN NEW LIFE, UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES ARE STILL RELATIVELY QUIET COMPARED TO THE SITUATION PRIOR TO OCTOBER, 1976.
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